

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE POLITICAL HERITAGE
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Rivers are highways that move on, and bear us whither we wish to go."

—PASCAL

The Ojibwa Indians called it the "MISISIPI" — meaning great river. On early maps of North America the river was given the name Mississippi and called the "Father of Waters." As it was explored the name seemed very fitting, for this mighty river flows from 1,475 feet above sea level for 2,552 miles to empty 724,000,000,000 cubic feet of water into the Gulf of Mexico each year. The river contains water flowing in from tributaries of thirty-one states and two "Canadian" provinces, the two largest tributaries being the Ohio and Missouri River.

Every river must have its source and that of the Mississippi was not known until 1832 when discovered in Lake Itasca in Northern Minnesota by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Michigan. From this small rivulet who could imagine the great "Father of Waters" would flow, growing in might and magnitude, and end its journey over 2,500 miles away?

Like every river, every flow and current of history must have its beginning somewhere in the past. Sometimes the true source is hidden from the searching eyes of the historian. Even those persons who by some act have begun an historical movement, fail to envision the magnitude of its engulfing tide. Could Martin Luther have foreseen the vast

encompassing reach of the movement he began almost 450 years ago in a small obscure village in Europe? The waves have travelled to the farthest shores and touched the lives of millions of peoples. Could one imagine that the ideas, thoughts, and burning passions of a few scattered men in the pages of history could culminate in the great American dream, conceived in oppression and birthed in revolution? Only by the wildest stretch of the imagination would it have been possible.

Looking up-river from its mouth it is unlikely that one can visualize the twisted course as the water rushes and falls, slows and glides, making its way to the sea. Nor can one accurately measure the contributions of the many tributaries adding their contents into the main course and thereby increasing its growth and power. So, it is not always with clear vision that one looks back into history to trace a movement from source to outlet and can give the proper degree of influence to all the contributing factors.

Historians have and will continue to argue the various merit and degree of influence, for good or ill, of certain persons and events on history's course. Yet, all people can see the product of the combined efforts as the movement finds expression through its outlet.

We shall attempt to take a brief look back into history and follow the course of our nation's political heritage as the ideas were borne along on the flow of history from approximately 1500 to 1800. In particular, we shall be concerned with these ideas as they stemmed from, were added to, or modified in various ways by the influence of religion, and which ultimately found expression in the American Way of Life.

CHAPTER II

NEW WINE IN OLD WINE-SKINS

"There can be no prescription old enough to supersede the Law of Nature and the grant of God Almighty, who has given to all men a natural right to be free, and they have it ordinarily in their power to make themselves so, if they please."

---JAMES OTIS

The Old World began to fragment from various pressures that seem to naturally evolve with the passing of time. The evolution of change is a force ever present in our world, wielding an influence sometimes so subtle as to be imperceptible and at other times so violent as to make the whole world tremble. As the "giant" in Gulliver's Travels breaks the bonds which hold him, so mankind breaks the shackles of political, economic, and religious restrictions and seeks the freedom of those "inalienable rights" which he believes to be the God given natural rights of all men.

The Old World was a tight, local, self-contained feudal world, a society based upon a caste system revolving about the agricultural production of the village or commune. Contact with the outside world was meager and often limited to a wayfaring stranger, soldiers on the move, or runaway serfs. But by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries travellers were becoming more and more frequent in the form of itinerant merchants, students, and others. The walls were being pushed back by this increased contact and larger view of the world beyond the village

gate. Monarchies were emerging and the individual's loyalty and allegiance was shifting from the local to the national center of power. The monarchs brought about economic and cultural changes. Private enterprise grew as the national market widened; roads and bridges were built; a system of weights and measures was established; and barriers to free movement of goods were removed to a large extent. As a result of these things a middle class arose and firmly established itself in the framework of the nations.¹

By no means, however, can this now be considered a free society for it was politically a world of "royal and dynastic absolutism." Larger and freer economically and culturally, but still restrictive politically and religiously. However, one man hammering his inscribed convictions on a church door created shock waves that reverberated in the far corners of the world of his day and caused reactions and movements that changed history's course.

Protestantism centered on the individual and his relation and responsibility to God and reacted from this springboard in all of society. In a large sense this new movement was anti-authoritarian, classless, and individualistic. It thrust the individual into a positive and responsible role in the activities of life. His voice became louder in defense of his rights; protests were made concerning the ruler who failed to fulfill his responsibility to the people, reminding him that the ruler is responsible to God for the faithful fulfillment of his office.

The path was not always clear and confusion, problems, and

conflicts often arose. The Counter-Reformation of the Catholics spearheaded by the Jesuits under the leadership of Ignatius Loyola regained much of the area the Reformation had claimed.

But before the end of the sixteenth century, the Roman Church had suppressed all serious opposition in Italy and Spain, had recaptured Bavaria and Austria and the southern part of the Netherlands, had made secure her domination of Poland and Hungary, and in France had confined Protestantism to a minority destined to further numerical decline.²

The Counter-Reformation expressed its zealotry in various intolerant and uncompromising attitudes towards the Protestants including the Inquisition and the Council of Trent. The religious wars and harsh persecutions running through the seventeenth century poisoned relations between the Protestants and Catholics and caused many people to look for refuge in the New World. The bitterness between Catholic and Protestant manifested itself in various ways including the idea that the establishment of English colonies on American soil would expand Protestantism's influence (as well as England's) and perhaps lessen the prestige and influence of Spain and Catholicism. Also, the attitude has been held and preached by Protestants for a long time that God kept America hidden until the fullness of time, that is, when Protestantism arose. The discovery of America and the act of Martin Luther in breaking with the Roman Church are considered as contemporary events taking place only twenty-five years apart. Therefore, many have considered the discovery and colonization of North America an act of Providence.

Further changes were taking place which eventually complete the chain of events leading a small group of people to undertake a perilous

voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. In England King Henry VIII rejected the authority of the pope over the Church of England, broke with Rome in 1534, and formed a national church. The church was Catholic in forms of worship and theology; the king was Supreme Governor appointing the bishops and controlling the ecclesiastical system; and it was the only legal church and all the people were required to attend. When Edward VI, the boy king, came to the throne reform influences from the Continent radically altered the national church. The form of worship became Protestant, the English language was used instead of Latin, the sermon was given more importance, congregational singing was permitted, the Communion service changed, and the priest became the "minister." This course was violently interrupted when Mary reigned for five years. She restored the church to Catholic control and so persecuted the Protestants she has found her place in history as "Bloody Mary."

For the church in England a new era dawned with Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The church was once again made Protestant and the queen acted as Supreme Governor of the church. The Catholic objection caused a great struggle but ultimately resulted in the vast majority of the English people rallying to the support of the queen. The Protestants who had fled "Bloody Mary's" wrath now returned and brought with them the influence of Calvin and the Protestants of Switzerland. The Thirty-Nine Articles adopted in 1563 expressed the views of Calvin and were an indication of the Puritan course the church was beginning to follow. However, Elizabeth's desire to maintain the ritual and ceremony blocked the "purification" of the church and restricted freedom of worship establishing penalties for all who would not conform.

Anglicanism became the official position, somewhere between the Catholic and Puritan points of view and leaving much to be desired as far as both parties were concerned.

The Puritans agitated to change the government of the church to a Presbyterian form but failed to do so because of the queen's strong opposition and the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Generally the Puritans had no desire to break from the national church, but there were among them a few radicals who advocated separating and returning to the early New Testament form of organization including complete independence of each congregation. This group became known as Separatists and because of their radicalism they soon came into disfavor with the civil authorities. As a result their congregations were disbanded, some members were imprisoned, property was confiscated, and some died under the harsh persecution. By the end of Elizabeth's reign they had been silenced or exiled. It is this small group who in 1620 boarded the Mayflower in Holland and sailed for the New World to finally find the freedom of expression they sought. Under King James and King Charles I the friction between the state church and the Puritans who remained, hoping to bring about certain changes and thereby find satisfaction within the church, continued. Their numbers increased and between 1628 and 1642 almost thirty thousand of them, some of England's strongest and most intelligent citizens, sailed for New England to establish their homes.

The entangling alliances between church and state through history have caused grave problems and retarded the progress and

development of the church. However, lessons have been learned by the religious body which have been implemented in forms of government which endeavor to maintain the proper relationship between God, government, and people. The political-religious situation in the Old World brought forth in the New World "a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." It would be difficult to overestimate the contributions of the Europeans, particularly the English, to our political heritage. In Protestantism they invested the individual with dignity and worth. They gave us the Rule of Law by which man and his conscience could be protected.

Judiciaries were to be free bodies engaged in protecting the rights and liberties of citizens. They brought the doctrine of the higher law - that the law of God and of nature was superior to those emanating from human authority - and later, they were to write this principle into the Declaration of Independence. They brought a constitutional theory based on popular sovereignty and the supremacy of the legislature. The English Constitution, representative government, trial by jury, free speech, a free press, religious toleration and freedom, local self-government, the sanctity and freedom of private property...³

These were some of the ideas and ideologies brought to this New World which became the building blocks of a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

CHAPTER III

THE JAMESTOWN SETTLEMENT

"Religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort."
-----BURKE

Chaplain Robert Hunt landed with the first group of settlers on the banks of the James in Virginia on May 13, 1607. This was significant for it marks from the very beginnings of this new nation the influence and place of religion in the lives of the people. A man of "perservering fortitude" he often was the arbitrator of quarrels and strife among the members of the company. Chaplain Hunt died, probably sometime in 1608, a victim of the famine and pestilence which claimed so many of the early Virginia settlers. But in this short time he established a program of worship consisting of daily prayers, two sermons every Sunday and the sacraments every three months. A church was built during the first year but was destroyed by fire along with the other buildings of the fort and in the destruction went the chaplain's small library.

Although the Jamestown settlement was a commercial enterprise the religious motivation for founding the new colony cannot be overlooked. William Warren Sweet in The Story of Religion in America holds the idea it was somewhat of a missionary venture to establish Protestant colonies in the New World, including converted Indians, and by this means advance England and the cause of Protestantism and in so doing perhaps check the power and influence of Spain and Catholicism.

A new charter was granted to the Virginia Company in 1609 and had as its shareholders several clergymen including two bishops, again showing the religious interest, and persons from all other walks of life. The new charter established a governor of the colony, one Lord Delaware, and representing him came Sir Thomas Gates accompanied by the second clergyman to Virginia, Mr. Richard Bucke. Appointed by the Bishop of London who called him "an able and painful preacher" he was a learned man, an Oxford graduate. Immediately upon arrival the party proceeded to Hunt's church, now rebuilt, where Chaplain Bucke offered a "zealous and sorrowful prayer." The governor's commission was then read and Deputy Governor Gates assumed office.

Soon thereafter a code of laws was drawn up which resulted in greater discipline among the colonists and brought an end to their hard times and heralded the beginning of happier and more prosperous days. Within this code, called Dale's Laws for Sir Thomas Dale, High Marshall of Virginia, was embodied along with some military laws, some of the religious ideals of the Virginia Company. Death was the penalty for blasphemy against the Godhead or the "Articles of the Christian Faith." A man using "unlawful oaths" was to receive "severe punishment." The second offense was to be punished by a "bodkin (long pin for punching holes in material) thrust through his tongue." A third offense was punishable by death.

From various sources it is evident that many undesirable persons including convicts found their way to the colony. Captain John Smith spoke of them as unruly gallants who were sent there by families and

friends to "escape ill destinies." No doubt these elements caused grave concern in such a young and struggling venture which needed dedicated people willing to share responsibilities and burdens. "Happy had we been had they never arrived," said Smith. Were these persons the objects of such severe laws? Not necessarily, for these laws were probably little different from those of many nations of that day. Then too, severe rules were directed to the clergy of the day. If they failed to conduct the required services during the week they would forfeit their weekly allowance. Each Sunday afternoon before "catechising" they were to read to the congregation "all these laws and ordinances" ("Dale's Laws"), failure to do so meaning loss of his "checkt for that weeke." Likewise, all the people were reminded of their religious obligations. God was to be "duly and daily served," morning and evening prayers were to be said, and preaching services were to be attended. Those who wilfully absented themselves were to be punished. Were such laws frequently executed? Probably not. John Smith said that many of the offenses of the undesirable element must be endured with charity for if each was punished according to his guilt the censure of the world would be "upon us to be guiltie of their blouds." As most laws these served as deterrents to open defiance and by occasional execution reminded the people that obedience was right and proper.

Political activity of the time was intertwined with the religious. Which influenced the other the greatest is not always clear.

From the earliest days the Church of England in Virginia was regarded as standing in a close, though not precisely defined, relation both to the colonial government and to the Church in

England. Thus royal instructions to the governor dealt with ecclesiastical affairs and the colonial government as a matter of course enacted ecclesiastical legislation.⁴

In July 1619 under the guidance of Sir Edwin Sandys the first representative assemble in America was constituted. At this time there were approximately 1000 persons in the colony. The assembly met in the "Quire of the Church" at Jamestown on July 30 and was in session for six days and passed thirty-four laws. Twelve of these dealt directly or indirectly with religion! In view of this can it be said that religion was the moving force? Some say no:

Nor can it be truly said that Puritanism had anything to do with the establishment of the first popular General Assembly in America... There was no thought in anyone's mind of anything that we would now call democracy...⁵

In spite of the influence of religion in the life of the Virginia colony it would probably be fair to say that this beginning in America yielded little direction to the course of American history. The desires were likely sincere to see Christianity take root in this new soil, but the mixture of commercialism, the secular control, the inflexible bonds of the mother church, and the attachment to the old world ways and means stifled and stunted the growth and development of the church in the New World.

Religion was there, but it was aristocratic religion, baptizing and sponsoring commercialism and imperialism...this type of Christianity with which Virginia began showed the same attitudes toward classes as it did toward races. In the churches congregations were seated according to age and social position and estate... Out of that soil the American dream could not and did not arise. It belonged to the decaying old... Where was the American dream born? It was conceived in the Mayflower Compact, was born in Rhode Island, grew up in Pennsylvania, became of age and legalized in Jefferson, and came to embodiment in Lincoln.⁶

CHAPTER IV

IN THE NAME OF GOD. AMEN.

"An oppressed people are authorized whenever they can to arise and break their fetters."
---HENRY CLAY

The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 not only recognized the right of Protestantism to exist, but also handed over to each state, whether kingdom, duchy, or principality, full power to control the creed within its borders. Whoever ruled the state could determine the religion of his subjects, a dictum which denied the right of individuals or groups of individuals to depart from the established faith. This brought a revolt in which the Huguenots in France battled for their right to believe as they wished, and some of the Puritans in England refused to conform to a manner of worship which retained much of the medieval liturgy and ceremony. Thus the Separatists were born.

The Separatists may be called radical Puritans. They rejected Anglican creeds, severed all bonds with a national church system, cast aside form, ceremony, and liturgy, as well as a hierarchy of church orders, and looked to the Word of God as the guide for true faith and worship. By the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign they all had been driven underground or into exile. Thus began the long journey to a New World.

It must be repeated that religion, whatever its form, is almost inseparably intertwined with the political, economic, social, and

intellectual attitudes of the times. To be sure, the Separatists sought to eliminate any outside influence, but can such a separation be absolutely complete? Having found a refuge in Holland they dwelled in peace for several years, but at last new and imperative reasons arose demanding another move. They were breaking under the hard labor, they feared to lose their language and saw no opportunity to educate their children, they disapproved of the lax Dutch observance of the Sabbath and saw in the temptations of the place a menace to the habits and morals of the younger members of the flock. Also, they considered the world around them a danger to the purity of their creed and practice. They determined to go to a new country "devoyd of all civill inhabitants" where they could retain their names, faith, and nationality. They considered various countries and wild coasts but finally decided Virginia would meet their needs and fulfill their requirements. But to accomplish this permission had to be obtained and so two deacons were sent to the Virginia Company of London. The deacons, John Carver and Robert Cushman, carried with them a document known as The Seven Articles which is a rather amazing document considering the Separatists were indeed separated from the Church of England. For in this document the Separatists acknowledge the Confession of Faith of the Church of England, the King's majesty over all persons, the King's authority to appoint bishops and overseers of the churches, and other similar points. Was then the divorce complete? It is most difficult to say, but it seems to show they were not quite so rigid in their position or they were willing to make these concessions because of their intense desire to leave the Netherlands.

In August 1620 two vessels, the Speedwell and the Mayflower, set sail. However the Speedwell proved unseaworthy and turned back and only the Mayflower, bearing one hundred and two passengers, went on. For sixty-five days they suffered the perils of the sea in a historic journey witnessed and recorded by William Bradford, governor of Plymouth Colony for thirty-three years. The Mayflower reached the waters of New England on November 11, 1620 but a landing place was not decided on until December 21st.

Dropping anchor at Cape Cod they found their charter or patent to be of no value that far north. Some among them (most likely certain "strangers" who had boarded at London) spoke of living free of any and all law and doing as they pleased. However, the men of the company gathered in the cabin of the Mayflower and drew up a covenant in accordance with which they joined themselves together into a body politic for their proper order and preservation. The Mayflower Compact was the political counterpart of the church covenant which bound together every Separatist community. E. Stanley Jones says, "...here in the Mayflower Compact democracy was conceived." Others speaking of it say it was merely a church covenant put to civic use. Nevertheless, realizing the close ties of religion and politics of that day the relationship and influence of each on the other is obvious. It provided that the people should live together in a peaceable and orderly manner under the civil authorities of their own choosing. It did not define a government but bound the people to unite politically as they had already done for religious worship. John Carver was

chosen as governor of the settlement and given one assistant and as the occasion or need arose the whole body met to consult the laws and add to them as their situation required.

By 1633 due to the rapid growth of the colony, its increasing prosperity and expansion to outlying areas, the governor required seven assistants. These officers were elected annually at a primary assembly held in Plymouth town and they with the assembly constituted the governing body of the colony. In 1636 a revision of the laws and ordinances was made in the form of "The Great Fundamentals," a sort of constitution, frequently interspersed with statements of principles.

So rapidly did the colony expand that by 1639 the holding of a primary assembly in Plymouth town became so inconvenient that delegates had to be chosen. Thus there was introduced into the colony a form of representative government. At first voting was limited to those who were members of the company and liable for its debt, but later suffrage was extended to include other than the original members. In 1668 a voter was one who possessed property and was "of sober and peaceable conversation," and would take an oath of fidelity, but apparently was not required to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown.

Thus the Pilgrims found their New World wherein they could retain their names and nationality as well as propagate their faith. These were hardy people willing to endure hardship for their convictions. They were not aristocracy or gentry but common people of working class without importance in the world of thought, literature, or education, but nevertheless their contribution was great. History seems to say

that America really began at Plymouth Rock. Yet no great movement can be traced to their initiation, no great leaders were born in their company, and no great works of art, literature, or scholarship are attributed to those who belonged to this unpretentious company. But doubtless, the movement and flow of the stream of consciousness that was to become the mind and heart of America began in earnest here. Perhaps the greatness of the Pilgrims lay in their illustrious example and in the influence they exercised upon the church life of later New England colonies. Their form of congregational organization and worship became the accepted form in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Yet seeds were sown and the roots of this beginning have gone deep in the soil of America's heritage.

CHAPTER V

EVOLUTION OF A NATION

"Revolutions are not made: they come. A Revolution is as natural a growth as an oak. It comes out of the past. Its foundations are laid far back,"

---WENDELL PHILLIPS

The current of this force which was to become the greatest nation in the world was not always smooth and its future was not always clear. There were many conflicts and struggles; hardships and heart-aches caused many to return to England and give up any hope of this becoming a land of the free. Persecution and intolerance was often directed toward those who in good conscience would not conform. In some cases these persons, families, and even congregations were forced to leave or left of their own choice to seek a new settlement. A brief look at this situation will show that this too was to become an influential part of this nation's heritage.

The Puritan was willing to endure hardship and suffering for the sake of civil and religious independence, but he was not willing to lose his identity among those who did not share his faith in the guiding hand of God or who denied the principles according to which he wished to govern his community. Each town or settlement usually consisted of a church and its pastor, who was often considered the authority on all matters civil and religious, a teacher who was in many cases the preacher he being the best educated, and the congregation all of whom were bound by a covenant - thus becoming an independent Congregational community.

For the majority of these people the Bible was the supreme authority and guide for life. The preacher was naturally Scripturally oriented and thus his political thinking was influenced accordingly.

They stood before the people as interpreters of God's will. Their political speeches were *sermons*, their political slogans were often Bible texts. What they taught of government had about it the authority of the divine.⁷

The large migration of people to the Massachusetts Colony brought many who were not in full sympathy with the theology and disagreed with the excessive concentration of power within the theocratic concept. The government of the colony had not become a constitutional system fashioned after the best liberal thought in England of that day, but a narrow oligarchy in which the political order was determined according to a rigid interpretation of theology. The dissenters were treated harshly mainly because they differed on theological rather than strictly political grounds.

These conflicts caused considerable strain on the Massachusetts Bay Colony and only because of its unyielding iron discipline that knew neither charity nor tolerance could it successfully weather the storms of controversy. Determined to save the colony from the menace of Anglican control and to prevent the admission of liberal and democratic ideas, the rulers struggled to maintain the rule of a minority in behalf of a precise and logically defined theocratic system that admitted neither experiment nor compromise.

Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, was forced to leave Boston because he questioned the authority of the government, denied the legality of its land title, and contested the right of the

magistrates to deal with ecclesiastical matters. After traveling through the wilderness he settled on the Mooshassuc River and called the place Providence. This plantation became a refuge for those fleeing the intolerance of Massachusetts and within two years a considerable number had settled the area. A covenant was drawn up in which the people promised to subject themselves "in active or passive obedience to all such orders or agreements" as might be made for the public good. They were incorporated into a "town fellowship" but only in civil matters. Thus the people of Providence put into practice a doctrine of separation of church and state, and a political order in which there were no magistrates, no elders exercising civil as well as spiritual authority, and no restraints on individual religious liberty.

In 1644 Williams published the "Bloudy Tenent of Persecution" in which he states his position on the separation of church and state in opposition to the attitudes expressed in Massachusetts and England. He stated the Bible does not condone persecution for cause of conscience and that God does not require a uniformity of religion to be enforced by civil authorities. He held that the civil government should attain its ends through political means, namely, through proper laws upheld and enforced by elected officials. The church should attain her ends through ecclesiastical means, that is, church government. Thus in this separation the state is prohibited from interfering in matters religious and the church is prohibited from dealing in matters political.

Roger Williams put the power of the government into the hands of the people although he recognized that "civill Government is an Ordinance

of God." The concept of government of the people, by the people, and for the people is in full agreement with his position and said government's extent of authority and length of rule is by the consent of the people. By these means the liberty of the people can be ensured.

Changes were now beginning to take place in the colonies which would have far reaching effects on the future of the nation. Among these were (1) the population increase from around 200,000 in 1690 to over two and one half million by the beginning of the Revolution. Where the population had been primarily English it was now being altered by the influx of Germans, Scotch-Irish, and other nationalities in smaller numbers. Of significance was the large number of Negroes imported and sold into slavery. This issue was already causing friction in some areas and was to prove to be one of the greatest errors made by the fathers of this country. (2) The new religious groups finding expression including the Quakers, the Baptists, the German Pietists, and others. (3) The influence of the English Enlightenment through such men as Isaac Newton and John Locke on the theories of science and government.

Thus with the physical separation of 3,000 miles between America and England there was also developing a separation in mind and thought. There was an American mind emerging which was being formed by many factors. Religiously grounded it was broadening and expanding even as the frontier was expanding to accept new ideas and a new native culture mixed with the old. More rapid means of communication were being developed, the printed word was more available and speed was increased

by new roads. The Great Awakening had far reaching social and religious significance. It challenged the traditional concepts of religious life and thought and, although causing some controversy, brought the colonists together in a spiritual brotherhood which overlooked, to a large extent, sect or denomination.

The evolution of change was taking place and religion was moving from the top of the ladder of influence to the bottom where it provided the foundation upon which the structure was to be established. It would be incorrect to say the church lost its power over the lives of society in this shift of position. In fact, it is quite possible that this change was providential in placing the church in its proper position to society. The influence had been keen and undeniable in the early colonial period. The mark had been made and the course set. The refinements were to be made in the political area away from the church which was right and proper for the foundation had been laid and the destiny was to be "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all."

It would take a revolution to bring the final separation from England and paradoxically to join thirteen colonies into one nation. It was this concept of freedom and the struggle to attain it which would give the American mind a broadness which would accept those who came in years ahead seeking freedom and toleration.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

"A nation as an individual has duties to fulfill appointed by God and his moral law."

---DESRAELI

Thomas Jefferson has been called the framer of the Declaration of Independence, and James Madison and Governor Morris of New York have been credited with the drafting of the Constitution of the United States. To be sure these men among others played key roles in the formulation of the basic documents of our nation's foundation. However, it would be more correct to say the people of the Thirteen Colonies were the true authors for from convictions long held and dearly defended came forth these principles of government, equality, and freedom.

That this American dream was of Christian origin seems abundantly clear. The Christian influence came through Protestantism and much, although not all of it, was through what in the inclusive sense of that term was known as Calvinism, mainly in the form of Puritanism and the movements which issued directly from it, were akin to it, or were profoundly influenced by it. The dream found embodiment not only in government and politics but also in many other phases of the ideals and life of the United States. What was called Calvinism was not the strict interpretation of his image and ideals but was a growing organism to which other thinkers had contributed. In England it helped to shape Puritanism, the Independents, the majority wing of the

Baptists, and by reaction from it, the Quakers. It was a force in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, Germany, and France, and in the Presbyterianism of the British Isles. Through these channels it became the most pervasive and influential strain in the Protestantism of the Thirteen Colonies and thus in inspiring and giving form to the American dream.

The Puritan settlers of Massachusetts repeatedly affirmed their faith that they were divinely chosen and that God had sifted a whole people to choose the best grain for New England.⁸ Thus, originally, the government in Church and state was in the hands of the "saints"—those who had had the personal experience of God's saving grace in Christ. The earliest New England was not to be considered a democracy as the United States later interpreted that term for suffrage was limited to church members and church membership was confined to the "saints." Religious tolerance was not fully practiced as evidenced by the prosecution in Massachusetts of dissenters from the "standing order," notably Quakers and Baptist.

However, the trend in New England, arising from religious convictions, was in the direction of democracy. Puritanism, which sought to cleanse the state church from what it regarded as corruption, moved towards the Independents who founded Plymouth colony and who represented the idea of a "gathered church", independent of the state and bound together by a covenant in a church whose only head was Christ. Here was the source of the congregationalism which prevailed in New England and which generally became Presbyterianism when its

members settled outside of New England. Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) did much to give Congregationalism a major impulse and to lead it toward democracy. As a refugee from Archbishop Laud's rule in the Church of England he fled to Holland and then to Massachusetts Bay. There as a pastor in the later Cambridge he was restive under the Puritan oligarchy, dissented from the limitations of the suffrage to church members, and led a company westward which founded Hartford, the nucleus of Connecticut. Under his inspiration and leadership the new colony, in response to principles he enunciated in a sermon on May 31, 1638, adopted a structure of government in which the franchise was conditioned neither by a property qualification nor a religious test. The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, drafted in response to Hooker's sermon, have been called the first written constitution of modern democracy.⁹ Roger Williams in Rhode Island colony gave impetus to freedom of conscience and liberty and equality in land and government. He sought to create a government which would heed the popular will and provide a place of opportunity for "such as were destitute."

A major contribution to the democracy of the United States and to other aspects of the American way of life came from John Locke (1632-1704). Locke has been remembered by philosophers chiefly for his Essay Concerning Human Understanding in which he endeavored to determine the certainty and adequacy of human knowledge. His effect on the future of the United States, however, was mainly political and religious. He held that the people are sovereign and have the right to govern themselves in whatever way seems to them to make for the common good.

He maintained that there are natural rights, among them property and personal freedom. He insisted that government is properly a form of contract into which the people enter with those who govern them, but that the form of the contract may be modified by the people to meet changing circumstances. Locke was a religious man of Puritan heritage although he often differed with certain features of it. He believed that he had demonstrated through philosophy the existence of God and the dependableness of "natural" religion. He also devoutly held to revelation, had a profound reverence for the Bible, and sought to allay the conflicts between rival sects by going back to the original Christianity and to disentangle the essentials of the faith as set forth in the Gospels from the later, and to him debatable, accretions. His was a religion and ethics of "common sense" and had a wide influence in the Colonies. His political and religious views undoubtedly influenced the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the constitutions of several of the states.

Some of the theories of government propounded by Locke were expounded in sermons in the New England churches. Either independently of him or encouraged by what he wrote, convictions similar to his on the origin and proper function of the civil state were again and again put forward by the New England clergy in the eighteenth century. Before the age of newspapers and other means of communication the preacher's voice was vitally important and extremely influential in forming and guiding public opinion. The clergy of the Colonies declared that though ordained by God, civil government did not come directly from

Him, but mediately through the people and had been founded on compact. The idea of compact was important in their theology and was viewed as the foundation of government and as at the root of all God's dealing with men. The people accepted as axiomatic the theory of social compact and used it to support the rights of the people both in the Church and the state.¹⁰ These theories gave freedom to the people in worship and politics but also laid heavily upon them their responsibilities in supporting the law of the land and those elected to carry it out if the liberties of the people were to be secured.

In conclusion it may be said that the ideals and forms of life, both private and in government, which have characterized the United States have been deeply indebted to the kind of Protestantism which was vigorous in the colonial period. The United States has not fully conformed to that Protestantism but from that force more than any other, can be traced many of the dominate features of the ethos of the United States of America.

FOOTNOTES

¹Louis M. Hacker, The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), I, p. 4.

²H. Sheldon Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, American Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) I, p. 5.

³Hacker, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴Smith, Handy, Loetscher, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵Thomas Cuming Hall, The Religious Background of American Culture (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930), p. 76.

⁶E. Stanley Jones, The Christ of the American Road (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944), pp. 52-53.

⁷Alice M. Baldwin, The New England Clergy and the American Revolution (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1958), p. 12.

⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), p. 8.

⁹Vernon Louis Parrington, The Colonial Mind 1620-1800 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), pp. 53-62

¹⁰Baldwin, op. cit., p. 24, 25

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